

# **I don't mean to nitpick Tom, but is this really your plan**

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

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Fledgling game developers Ubisoft - prior to unleashing their first ever title in 1986 - were apparently massive fans of George A. Romero's 1978 horror zomedy, Dawn of the Dead. So much so they felt compelled to reproduce it in playable pixels, via France's most popular 8-bit computer system of the time; the Amstrad CPC. Though not so much that they felt obliged to acquire official endorsement from the relevant movie studio, Laurel Group Inc.

Had 'Zombi' been based on the *first* entry in the grisly apocalyptic series, Night of the Living Dead, Ubisoft could have skipped this stipulation legitimately owing to a copyright goof that left the movie wide open to abuse, and Romero and co. out of pocket. At the time the law decreed the necessity for a copyright notice to be visible on the title

card, only when 'Night of the Flesh Eaters' (its working title) was renamed, the distributors forgot to reapply it.



Romero wasn't about to repeat the same mistake where the sequel was concerned, yet perhaps in 1978 during the industry's infancy licensed gaming spin-offs weren't high on his list of priorities. Even eight years later when Ubisoft 'adopted' the IP playable small screen accompaniments weren't considered the lucrative prospect they are today.



As an existing, successful company looking to diversify - they operated from a chateaux, earning 40 million francs in 1986 - it would have been entirely feasible for Ubisoft to play by the book, securing a genuine rubber stamp of approval. Before the value of such deals was recognised they'd likely have agreed upon a modest fee and still been able to turn a healthy profit. Capitalising on the notoriety of the \$55m grossing movie and iconic director's legacy certainly wouldn't have hurt. Given that he appears on screen in two cameo roles Romero could even have featured on the box in character. Regardless Zombi sold five thousand copies by January 1987, prior to porting it to other platforms.



*Movie director George plays a TV director. That must have been a stretch.*





*Yep, that's as good as it gets. This is the only picture online of Romero's Santa Claus cameo.*

Astoundingly the connection appears to have slipped under the production studio's radar, and even some gaming critics failed to notice what was right under their noses...

"Ubisoft is a French software house making its first entry into the UK market with what looks like a distinctive and original game. The plot is simple enough: the dead are coming back to life, and you have to help four of the living stay that way. It's all acted out as an icon-driven adventure in a supermarket.

It will take some time to get into the game but it has a lot to offer in the way of detailed atmospheric graphics,

unusual game control and tough tasks. Not for those who like a game that's easy to get to grips with."

### **Amstrad Action (69%, Christmas 1986)**

Ironically by deviously switching the title to Zombi without an 'e' Ubisoft (accidentally?) hit upon the name given to Dario Argento's Italian cut of Dawn of the Dead. In France it was released as 'Zombie' *with* the 'e'.

Elsewhere minor adjustments were made to distinguish the pixelated incarnation from its celluloid counterpart, though some are so insignificant it makes one wonder if they were actually mistakes rather than deliberate obfuscation or subterfuge.

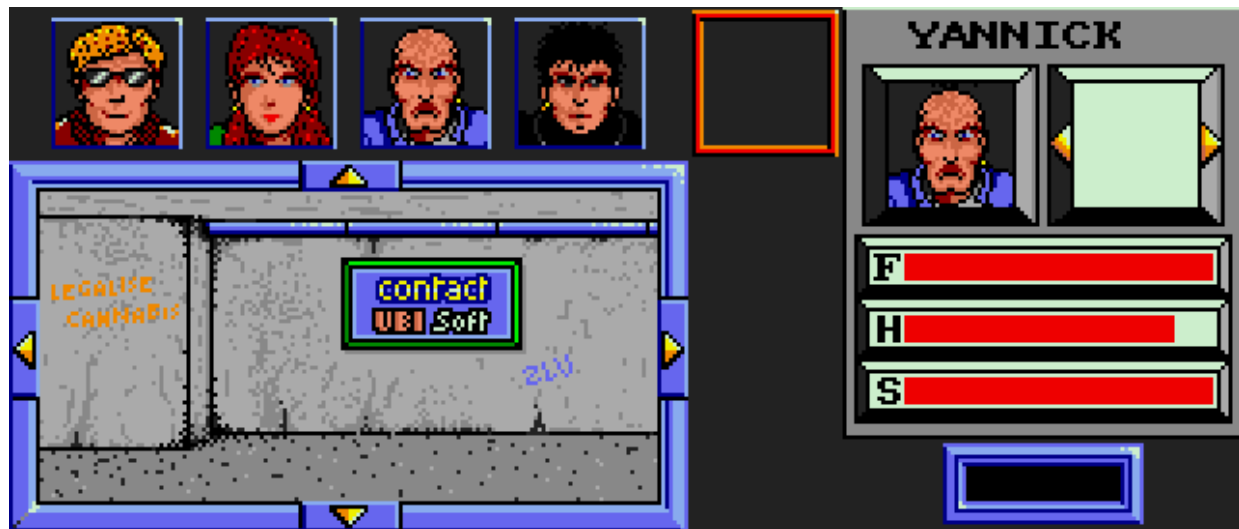
It won't have escaped your notice for instance that Ubisoft's tagline: "When there is no room left in hell... dead people come back to life." is analogous to the one used to promote the movie: "When there's no more room in hell, the dead will walk the earth." Having been poorly translated from its native French Amstrad instalment, the English Amiga/Atari ST update delivered in 1990 is plagued by dodgy Engrish, so it wouldn't be illogical to assume this is merely the first example. Discovered before the game has even booted up it should be noted!



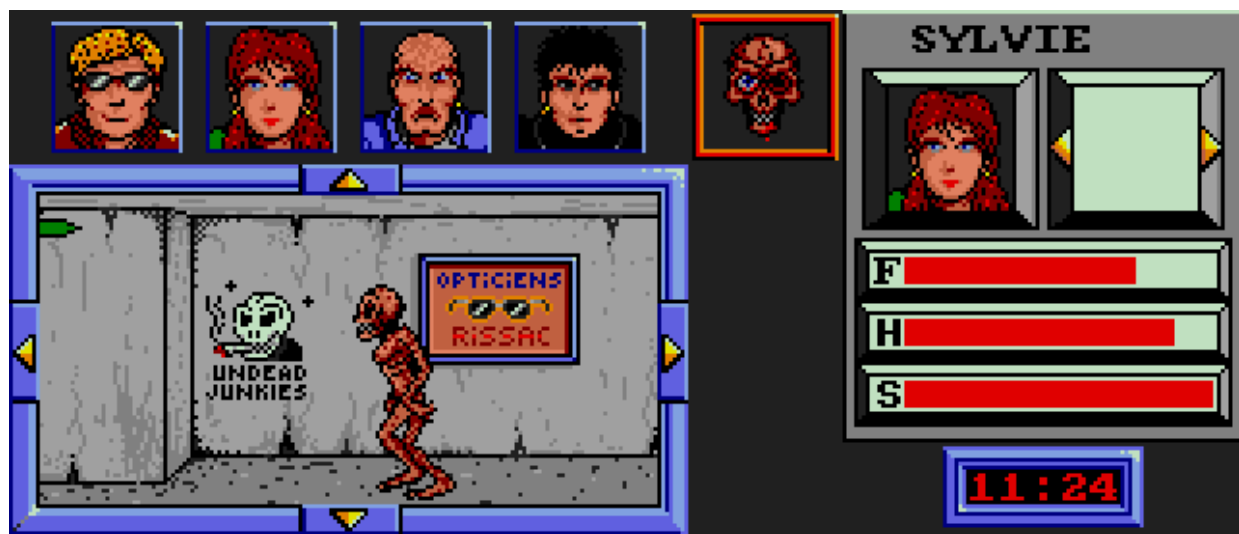
Localisation was such an afterthought you'd never know the game was set in America. Even in the 'English' version most of the shops, billboards, graffiti and so on are written in French. Nevertheless it's worth keeping an eye out for background Easter eggs such as the advert for 'Asphalt'; a top-down racing game also courtesy of Ubisoft, released in 1987.



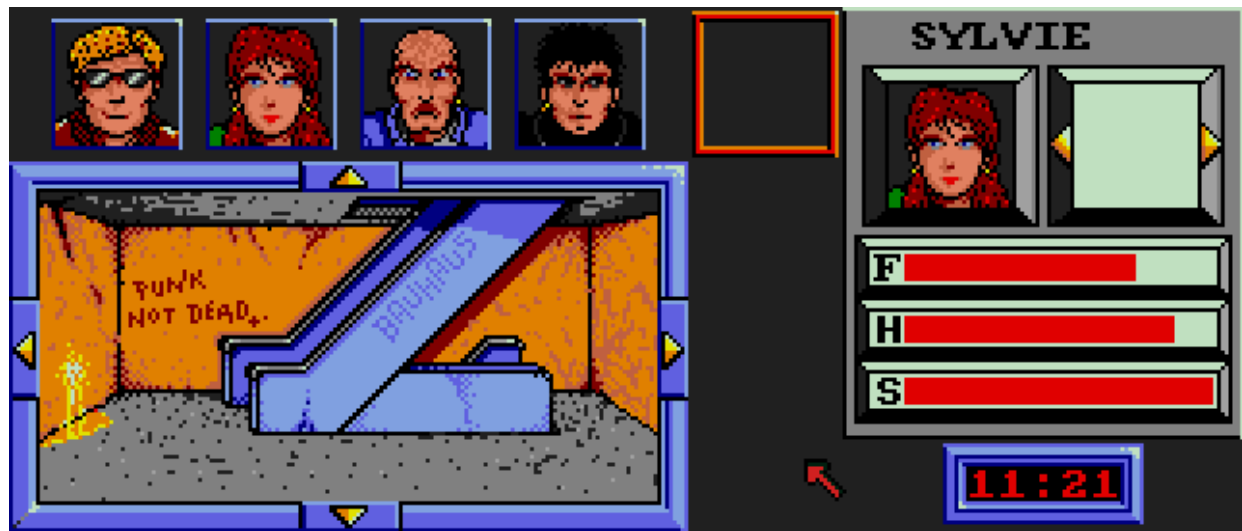
*Elsewhere you'll spot programmer job adverts...*



*When there are no cops left alive to arrest you, cannabis is perfectly legal.*



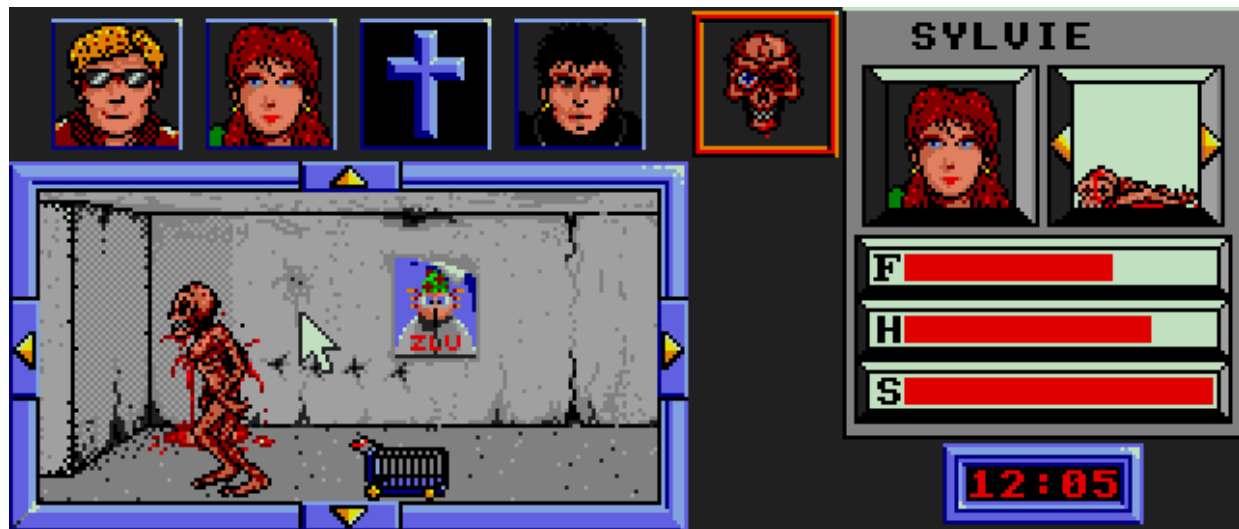
...and references to the developers' musical or artistic predilections. Bauhaus and Sisters of Mercy for example.



*Who is 'Zlu' and why should we votez for him/her?*







Dawn of the Dead stars four protagonists - a TV station manager, news pilot, and two police SWAT officers - who 'borrow' the station's helicopter to escape the imminent onslaught of a zombie apocalypse.



Soon running dry of fuel they're forced to land on top of Monroeville Mall in Pennsylvania... a bit of a mixed blessing as it turns out.



Naturally, it's crammed to the rafters with useful resources, though as it's also a Mecca for shopping junkies, is unfortunately crawling with undead automatons, having returned to their pleasure centre haunt on autopilot, emulating their former existence.



Francine Parker: They're still here.

Stephen: They're after us. They know we're still in here.

Peter: They're after the place. They don't know why; they just remember. Remember that they want to be in here.



Francine Parker: What the hell are they?

Peter: They're us, that's all, when there's no more room in hell.

Stephen: What?

Peter: Something my granddad used to tell us. You know Macumba? Voodoo. My granddad was a priest in Trinidad. He used to tell us, "When there's no more room in hell, the dead will walk the Earth."

I emphasise the word 'existence' rather than *lives* because Dawn of the Dead is a thinly veiled satire of blind, dumb, hedonistic consumerism. Romero's zombies are regularly, astutely equated with the humans they once were, to comedic effect. In contrast to Zack Snyder's horrifically gut-wrenching 2004 remake, the original is laden with slap-stick, is ridiculously camp beyond belief, and awfully unconvincing as a pure horror movie.





*Zombies aren't scary until there's a chance they could catch you. Tick!*

It doesn't matter so much; I suspect that terrifying the public in the traditional manner we've since become accustomed to was never the intention. Despite its cheesy production values and hammy acting, it's far more cerebral than your average blood-soaked, slasher gorefest. Without become swamped by it, Dawn of the Dead is engorged with insightful social commentary, which is partly why it made such an impact in the seventies and is still affectionately remembered and alluded to today.





Francine Parker: What are they doing? Why do they come here?

Stephen: Some kind of instinct. Memory of what they used to do. This was an important place in their lives.



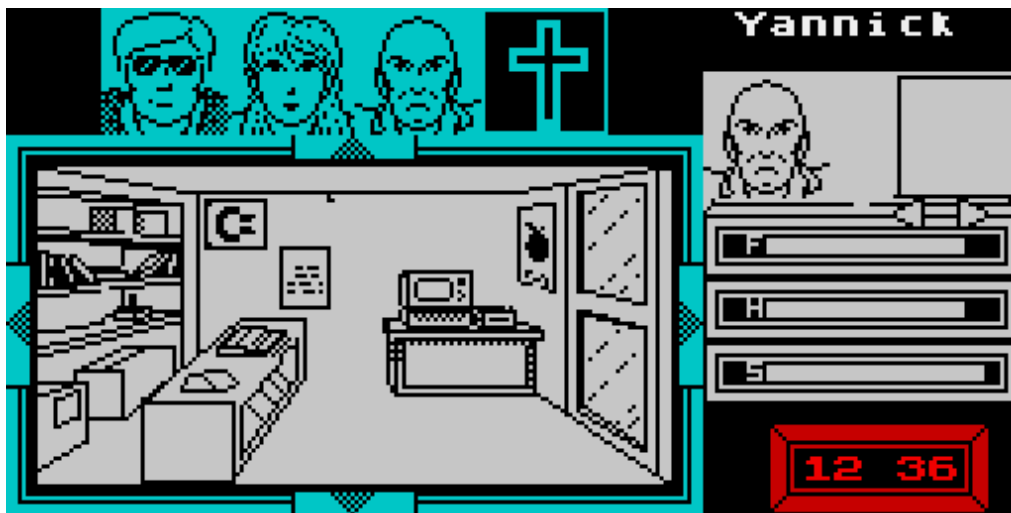
As time and zombies march on there's some debate as to whether or not to adopt the shopping mall as a sanctuary rather than treating it as a temporary stopgap on route to the theoretical safe harbour of an unspecified island. Commonly known as a pipe-dream. Speaking of which, precisely this scenario would be many people's dream come true; everything you could possibly want to buy... from a gaudy, flashing megaplex stuck on 'free vend'. Would it really be so bad to stick around given that the only drawback is having to rub along with a few unsavoury flesh-rotting types? After all they're 'people' too, only a few steps removed from you and me.



*For any fans of spotting vintage computers in movies that's an IBM 3277 terminal with a beam spring keyboard in the background. Thanks go to EAB member mr\_a500 for identifying it.*



*There's also a fascinating glimpse into the world of '70s coin-op gaming to be found in the mall amusements arcade scene.*



*A Commodore 'chicken lips' logo in a Spectrum game? You'll have a riot on your hands!*

Francine Parker: Stephen, I'm afraid. You're hypnotised by this place. All of you! You don't see that it's not a



sanctuary, it's a prison! Let's just take what we need and get out of here!

Stephen: Do you have any idea how many times we would have to land to refuel on our way up north to Canada? Those things are everywhere! The authorities would give us just as hard a time, maybe worse. Fran, we have everything we need right here. Besides, you always wanted to play house, remember?



In the movie, the decision is rendered moot, spurred by the need to transport a three-months pregnant Francine to somewhere she can receive medical treatment. Oh, and the small matter of the biker thugs gatecrashing the party, stealing the looted loot and ransacking the place.





*You're smoking for two now remember. Don't skimp, let me light you another.*

Peter: Just three of them, huh?

Stephen: Holy s\*\*t!

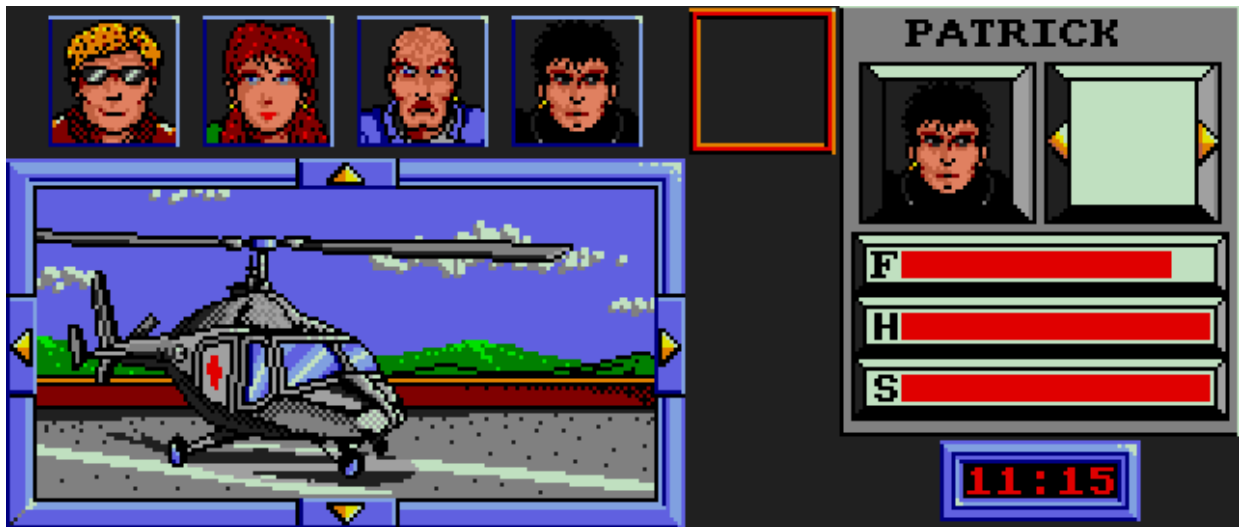
Peter: They'll get in. They'll move the trucks.

Stephen: There's hundreds of those creatures down there.

Peter: Come on, man, that's a professional army. Looks like they've been surviving on the road all through this thing. Well, let's not make it easy for them.



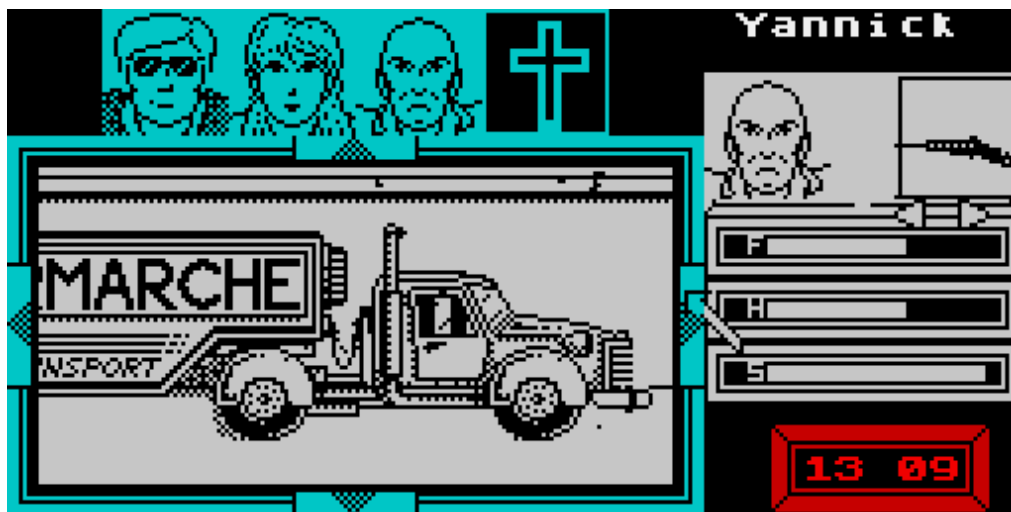
*Ha-ha, look how big smartphones were back in the '70s! Now they're smaller, ha-ha etc. etc.*



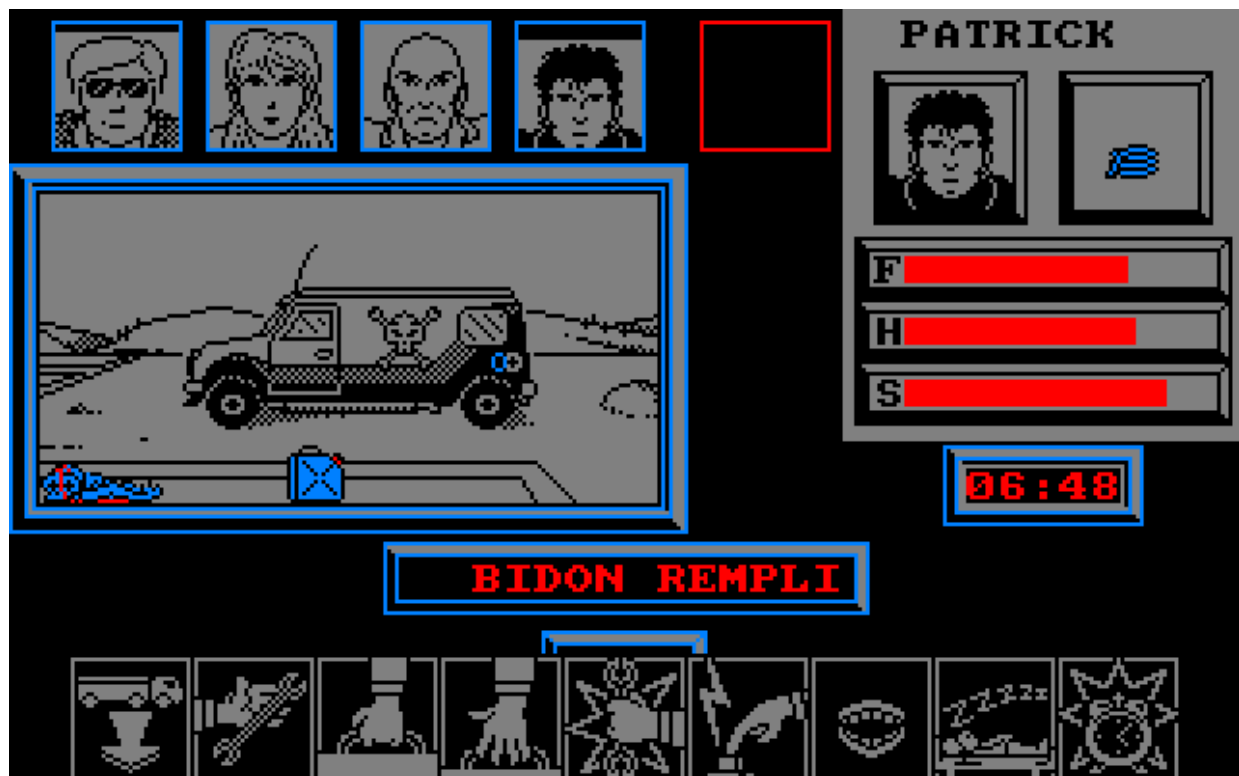
Back to plan A then; refuel the helicopter and evacuate before they get too comfortable with the 'Life of Riley'.



This entails relocating a series of dormant trucks in front of the vulnerable entrances to avert any more zombies from flooding the mall...



...and then siphoning the petrol from the truck of a marauding gang of Hell's Angels who show up later to ransack the consumerist spoils and nick our lovely shiny chopper. I've inserted an apostrophe in Hell's since they don't understand how that works.



*Yes, I know Hell's Angels typically ride motorbikes. This entourage vehicle must belong to their make-up team. ;)*

"This game is horrible, I don't mean gameplay-wise I'm talking about the subject matter - it's so-o-o creepy. I nearly jumped out of my seat the first couple of times a zombie attacked. They look like something out of a real-life horror movie, so pull the curtains, turn off the lights and prepare for a new nightmare!"

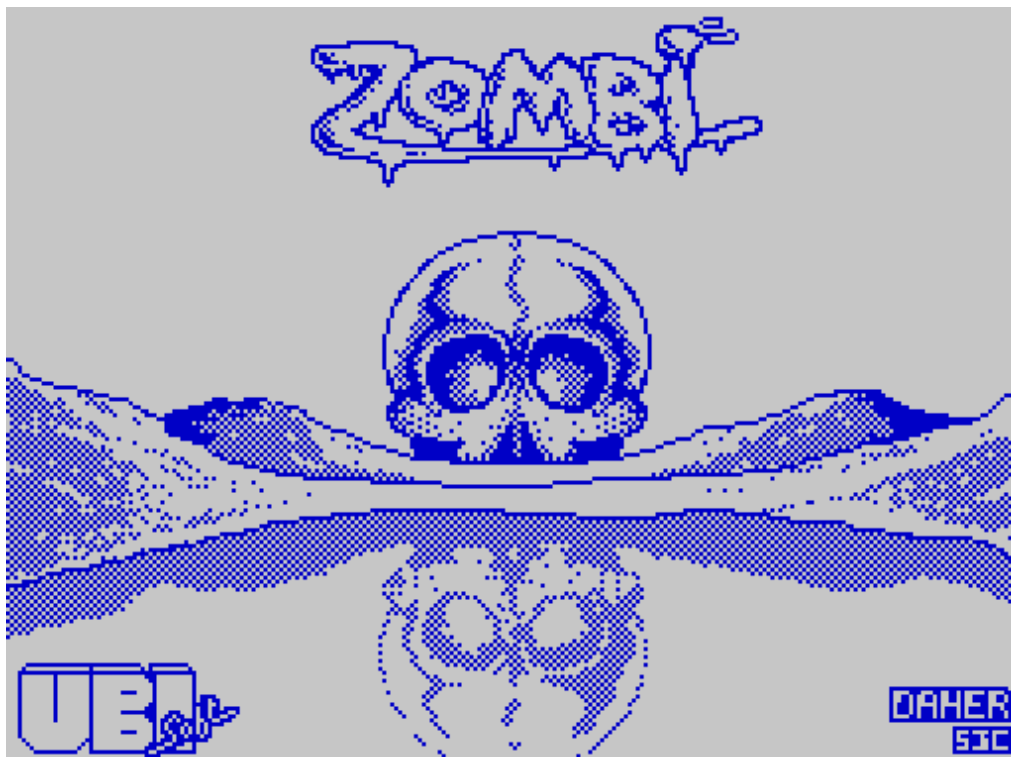
### **The Games Machine (77%, Atari ST, March 1990)**

Ubisoft's interpretation replicates the barebones of Dawn of the Dead's plot very closely, albeit via a minimally animated point and click action-adventure featuring a single operate (spanner) button, plus four contextual direction arrows. As a very task-orientated movie it was ripe for game conversion since our goals and motivations are so accessible and transparent.



"Although the game is the same, the control method is different to that of the PC game. Movement is controlled using direction icons placed around the outside-view display. This makes for far simpler control of your characters and an ultimately more impressive game which horror lovers and fans of good games will eat brains for."

**C&VG (93%, Spectrum, April 1990)**



We can carry up to six objects simultaneously per character, introducing a strategy (and backtracking) element by forcing us to juggle our inventory. Generous compared to the original Amstrad offering which limited us to just four objects. If accrued items are left where they'll eventually be utilised we'll always know where to find them later.

Trickier still, nothing is labelled whether hovered over or clicked on in the environment or once 'holstered' in the inventory. A bit of explanatory text might have been useful.

Accordingly, it's not at all clear what our stat bars represent or how to replenish them. For the record: F = food, H = health, S = stamina.

Despite occupying the same genre and sharing Monkey Island's year of release, it's no match for the LucasArts classic. Even Curse of Enchantia with its 'no dialogue policy' makes Zombi look devoid of depth, and its minuscule playfield... well *minuscule*. At least twice as many pixels are dedicated to blank space and the GUI, eroding the useful area to a mere porthole.



Philadelphia TV station staff (and romantic partners), Francine Parker and Stephen Andrews, and police SWAT officers, Roger DiMarco and Peter Washington, were replaced with four members of the Ubisoft development/management team...



Patrick Daher - graphics artist, Yannick Cadin - programmer, Alexandre Bonan - scriptwriter, Sylvie Hugonnier - director of marketing and public relations.



While each possessing unique names and avatars, they operate identically aside from the sole female character not being able to use a gun or some of the makeshift swords (tools) - no doubt a nod towards the *initial* sexism levelled towards her in the movie I expect.



Francine is eventually allowed to play with the boy's toys and treated as an equal at her insistence. A fine example of a strong, independent female lead, in a horror movie of all places. Snazzy outfit courtesy of J.C. Penney (IOU in the post).





Peter: She looks sick.

Roger: Come on, wouldn't you be?

Peter: No, man, I mean she really looks ill.

Stephen: She's pregnant.

Roger: (nervously) Hey, maybe we should get moving.

Peter: We can handle it.



Roger: Yeah, but what if she needs a doctor...?

Peter: (interrupting) We can handle it! It doesn't change a thing.

(to Stephen)

Peter: Do you want to get rid of it?

Stephen: (shocked) *What?*

Peter: Do you want to abort it? It's not too late, and I know how.

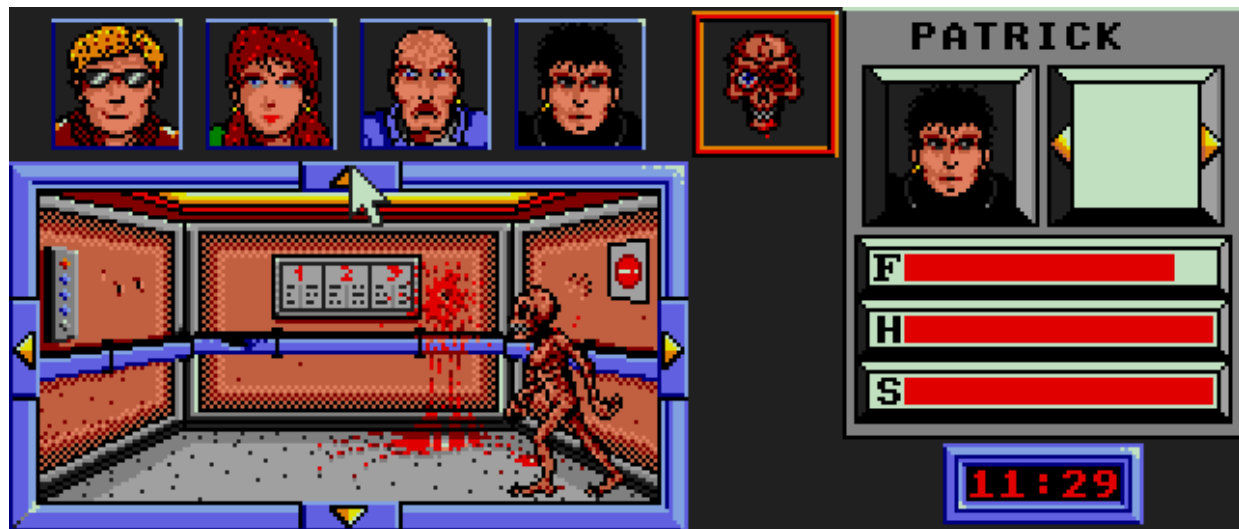
Maybe someone should consult the mother-to-be first? *She* might have an opinion on the matter. I know she's only a woman and all that. Nevermind, how's the game?

"Zombi is a first-rate adaption of a classic horror film, which catches the mood perfectly even before you begin (you get a scene-setting 'comic book' with the packaging) and will keep your interest until completion."

**C&VG (92%, April 1990)**

"If you want a game that's got lots of atmosphere look no further - my wife had to leave the room because she couldn't take the pressure!"

**Atari ST User (90%, July 1989)**



*Lifts are the easiest way to travel between floors, even post-zombie-invasion. We're not able to exploit the ventilation shafts as in the movie.*



Impressively for such an early adventure title, characters can be switched between at will and occasionally must be engaged as a team. For instance when the basement demands illumination with a flashlight whilst another crew member blasts the zombies in the head with their infinite ammo-ed shotgun.



Elsewhere we can rely on natural light, until the sun goes down. Rather impressively Zombi features a day-night cycle, emphasising the importance of timing; we have just 24 hours to complete the mission aside from the threat posed by impending gloom.

If we survive long enough to make it worthwhile it's possible to save our progress via the built-in function. Once mastered, Zombi isn't a long game by any means so we could have got by without it. That said, it's nice to have the option, especially in a game of this vintage that's more action than adventure-focused.

Dr Foster: Every dead body that is not exterminated becomes one of them. It gets up and kills! The people it kills get up and kill!



*I think it's safe to say this one won't be making a comeback!  
Not least because pre-head-burst, it's clearly a dummy.*

Regrettably, they don't take the prospect of being anaesthetised lying down - unless we bash their brains in they'll soon reanimate and return to stalk us. Much like our own team-mates should they succumb to a zombie bite and be transmogrified themselves as Roger and Stephen do in the movie.





Roger: You'll take care of me when I go, won't you, Peter?

Peter: Just rest, man. Save your strength.

Roger: I don't want to be walkin' around... like THAT!...

Peter... PETER?

Peter: I'm here, man!

Roger: Don't do it until you are sure I *am* coming back!  
I'm gonna try... not to... I'm gonna try... not to... come  
back. I'm gonna try... not to...

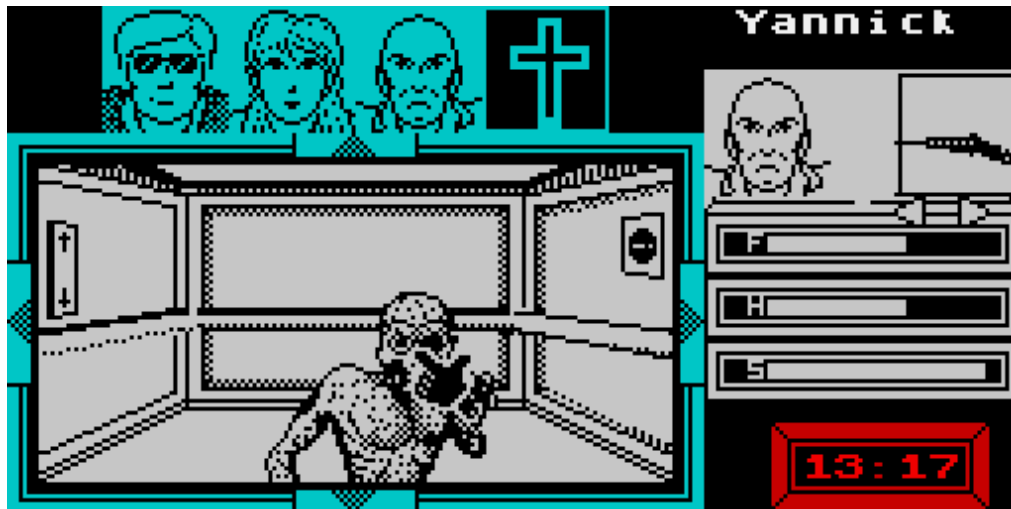


Correlating neatly with the movie now the corpses must be transported to the basement where we find a freezer belonging to the mall's restaurant. They'll be fine right next to the hunks of beef, pork and whatnot, it's all meat.



Suspension in ice will prevent them from decomposing further, thereby poisoning the air with their putrid stench. Granted it hardly matters if we're to split. Never mind, it happens in the movie because our advocates of continued human existence haven't yet resigned themselves to this truth.

Peter: This place is gonna be rotten. We've got to clean it up, brother.



Otherwise the game's freezer scenario may have whiffed of a superfluous puzzle-padder since a bullet to the cranium is sufficient to terminally incapacitate the zombies. That's the law. Nevertheless, moving the wretched bodies *does* serve another purpose in-game so the exercise is more crucial than we might at first imagine. If we leave our crew in an area containing a zombie corpse their health deteriorates without even touching it.



"There seems to be quite a lot to do and plenty of places to explore in Zombi. The way that you coordinate your



characters takes a little getting used to, but this doesn't really detract from the game. On the whole this is one of the more creative and atmospheric animated adventure games I've come across recently and should provide some involvement entertainment for general gamers as well as hardened adventure fans. Worth the wait!"

**ACE (90%, March 1990)**



Luckily - as on the silver screen - weapons are in plentiful supply thanks to the conveniently placed arms store, and of course the staff who would normally check ID and take payment being otherwise engaged. In lieu of the three guns and an axe found in this nut-job's paradise we enter the fray with only our fists for defence. Naturally relying on these depletes our stamina faster than a labour-saving weapon.





Zombies won't attack immediately since their brains only register our presence after being in the room for eight seconds. You'd struggle with mental agility too if you'd been pronounced clinically dead. Quite convenient for us mind you; their dimwitted reactions permit us to enter a room, grab any useful tools lying around and vamoose again unscathed.



If we linger too long they'll turn to face out of the screen, staring right at us with their lifeless droopy peepers, which is all a bit unnerving for anyone who enjoys keeping their innards on the *inside*.



Combat consists of clicking wherever we'd like to punch or whack them with a blunt instrument of some sort, or shooting them with our cache of firearms.



Energy-boosting 'sustenance' is also on our doorstep in the form of McDonald's (Mac Gropak) take-out burgers and coke. An infectious zombie epidemic could have erupted anywhere on the planet and we could guarantee the same could be

said. I think there's a clear case for direct cause and effect there. :|



Break into the bed store and it's possible to take a nap to kick-start our flagging stamina. Although I'd make sure you sleep with one eye open or with a guard standing by on watch duty!



"Zombi's age and relative lack of action may deter a section of the games-playing public, but it's well worth the trouble - if you've the patience and imagination to get involved."

### **The One (72%, Atari ST, April 1989)**

"The one drawback of the game comes from a strange feeling you get the more you play. Zombi feels, well, old. The design and the gameplay are fairly good but... hmm, I dunno. It is very similar to Catch 23, remember that? Similar game, similar gameplay. If it had appeared three or four years ago Zombi would have been a cracker. But now I can't help but feel it's well past it."

### **Zzap! (72%, C64, November 1990)**



"The game itself is tiresome and dull, and quite frankly I'm glad we missed it first time round."

### **ST Format (40%, December 1990)**

If you've seen the still-entertaining movie, the puzzles don't need to be deciphered, rather duplicated on screen until we reach the roof clutching the life-saving fuel required to

propel us to freedom... or a postponed mauling in an alternative deathtrap once we get our breath back.

In the movie only Francine and Peter survive to possibly-maybe begin a new life elsewhere. A sense of doubt is neatly introduced by the troubling observation that they have little fuel available to make this a reality. Still it was a satisfactory compromise between an overly saccharine perky Hollywood ending, and the eternally bleak conclusion proposed in the first draft. It was the right decision for Francine and Peter too as it happens judging by how quickly the zombie army overwhelm the mall while the credits roll.



*The many faces of 'game over'.*

Originally Peter was to shoot himself in the head (as contemplated in the theatrical release) and Francine lose all hope in the future, committing suicide by deliberately forgetting to duck underneath the rotary blades of the getaway helicopter. This sickening concept and the technology intended to execute it didn't go to waste. Instead it was employed in detonating a SWAT officer's head and treating a zombie to an extremely close 'hair cut'. Probably not a conscious decision as such on his part. Zombies don't



do a great deal of thinking in my extensive experience of studying them first hand.



Suicide is mirrored in-game in that it's possible to hurl yourself out of the window if the pressure all gets a bit much. I love the way this is described in the Frenglish manual...

"If you find it too difficult to use the computer, then have a last go at 'BYE'."



"Zombi is not the most involving product I have ever played, but it is quite enjoyable. Quite taxing, but not brain-busting, it is definitely worth an evening or two of anybody's time."

**CU Amiga (85%, May 1990)**



*Attempting suicide must be contagious. Each bullet wasted means one more member of the undead left twitching. So selfish!*

Even if you have yet to indulge in the bizarre, wonky big-screen rendition, the hastily sketched black and white comic included in the package provides plenty of clues as it elucidates the plot. You won't find any sort of hand-holding introduction in-game so this is essential for newcomers. Unstructured as the escapade is, it would be tough to fathom otherwise.

"Zombi sounds as though it could be a smash. Unfortunately lack of instructions and bugs (at least in the review copy) are its downfall anybody know what the 'Safeguard' disk is? From the opening title screen, you expect to be in for a treat. I suppose in a way you are, if you can figure out what to do. The graphics and layout are of high quality, the instructions are somewhere in the English Channel and me, I'm confused!"

## Amstrad Action (69%, Christmas 1986)



In 1986 - in its original format - Zombi was understandably a striking corollary to the movie it definitely wasn't a rip-off off of... of. Why can't anyone simply say 'based on' these days? Four years later re-issued with little in the way of enhancement the six month Assembly code project looked a bit long in the tooth, a relic rescued from a time capsule. Most critically, where was the shopping spree scene?



Roger: Well, we're in, but how the hell are we gonna get back?

Peter: Who the hell cares! Let's go shopping!

Roger: Watches! Watches!





Peter: Wait a minute, man. Let's just get the stuff we need. I'll get a television and a radio.

Roger: Ooohh, ooohh, lighter fluid! And chocolate. Chocolate!

Roger: Hey, how about a mink coat?

Roger: One-stop shopping: everything you need, right at your fingertips.

And why no pie-splatting mini-game? I'm not joking, Dawn of the Dead momentarily flips into pantomime territory when the biker gang arrives.



Regardless it somehow retains a vague semblance of the movie's puerile, yet apprehensive atmosphere, even with a dearth of in-game music and only primitive, perfunctory sound effects. That said, the whistling wind heard whenever visiting the roof-top helicopter is unexpectedly effective. Had our attention not been drawn to the overall audio deficit by the theatrically suspenseful music played only over the title screen, the contrast might not have been so glaringly conspicuous.



David Whittaker composed an alternative track for the Atari ST revamp that plays throughout the game. You might like to check it out if the Amiga tune feels like someone is gnawing away at your lugholes. Both are perfectly fine, I just wanted to jack up the zombie metaphor tally.

Polka style tune, 'The Gonk', taken from the public domain De Wolfe Music Library is the quirky ditty everyone associates with Dawn of the Dead. Amongst other things. Charlie Brooker used the same piece for the introduction to his satirical Screen Wipe TV series as is heard over Dawn of the Dead's closing credits.

In the latter it's circus-esque playfulness is presented in immaculate disharmony with the bloodshed and annihilation inherent to nauseating zombie horror movies. It's equally as absurd as becoming preoccupied with measuring one's blood pressure when corralled by a ring of ravenous human-flesh-munchers... and also absurd not to use it in the game?

Probably not. There isn't much light relief to be found amidst Ubisoft's morbid vision. *Black* comedy or otherwise.



"Graphically similar to the ST version, the Amiga features improved sound (of course). However, the tunes aren't anything to really shout about, with the spot FX having most impression. Horror movie buffs take a peek (from behind the sofa preferably)."

### **The Games Machine (79%, March 1990)**

Not that any of these shortcomings deterred CU Amiga from awarding the bog-standard, clunky update with an 85% score in May 1990 and - the icing on the cake - a 'CU Screen Star' badge of honour. In fact, they appreciated it so much they ended up re-publishing the game via one of the cover disks

delivered with their July 1991 issue. It really *was* old-school by that stage.

In *turn* Ubisoft had yet to be satiated of their compulsion towards gruesome visitors from beyond the grave; still alive and wriggling in 2012 they released an entirely unrelated (title screen switch Easter egg aside) first-person horror survival game known as ZombiU... for the Wii U surprisingly enough.

I bet you bought it didn't you? You blissfully ignorant capitalist pig! Congratulations, you're everything that's wrong with society. I hope you're happy now.

\*folds arms, turning away in disgust\*